



# TROUBLE IN TOYLAND 2019

[www.ToySafetyTips.org](http://www.ToySafetyTips.org)

**EVERY YEAR, MILLIONS OF PARENTS,** grandparents and caregivers buy toys for the loved ones in their lives. Luckily, these toys are safer than ever thanks to years of progress driven by consumer non-profits, public health organizations, elected officials, and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

For 34 years, our annual *Trouble in Toyland* has helped expose threats, including high levels of lead, "smart" toys with data security flaws, choking hazards, and more. By revealing these dangers, the report has empowered parents to take action to ensure toys are safe, while simultaneously pushing decision-makers to enact legislation like the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act to remove these threats completely.

Despite that progress, dangerous toys continue to reach the market and injure children. In May, the Washington Attorney General announced testing, which revealed illegal levels of lead and cadmium in supplies and kids' jewelry. There were 15,000

purchases of these products. In August, the Wall Street Journal found thousands of toys that failed to meet safety standards for choking hazards, toxics, and other threats--including two toys with illegal levels of lead.

It isn't surprising then, that the CPSC's most recently available data reveals 251,700 emergency room visits resulting from toys. This number doesn't begin to account for the long term damages caused by toxins such as lead, boron, or cadmium, which researchers continue to find in toys and other products marketed to children.

Many of these injuries and hazards are avoidable through vigilance and improvements to the toy safety system.

But with so many toys hitting the market every year, how can people make sure their kids' toys are safe? We've found dangerous toys parents can identify themselves; those that require stronger safety standards to keep kids safe; and lastly, recalled toys that are still for sale.

# Toy dangers you can identify

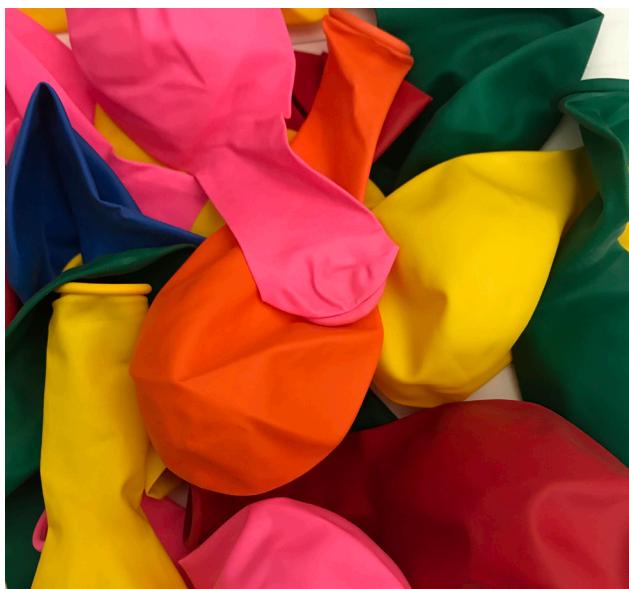
## Choking hazards

Before handing that new toy over to a child, especially if that child or another in the home is under 3 years old, you should check if it poses a choking hazard. While toys are supposed to be labeled when they contain small parts, a recent Wall Street Journal investigation found 64% of toys on Amazon did not have the same warning labels displayed on another major website. Since toys are often hand-wrapped as gifts, there may never be a chance for the parent to check the package for a label or take the toy away from an already playing child.



Game pieces, figurines, customizable products, or self-assembled items can also contain parts that pose a choking hazard. These pieces occasionally break off, turning the toy into a choking risk—like the recently recalled Ubbi Connecting bath toys and the hundreds of thousands of wooden vehicles sold by Target, which were recalled earlier this year.

**TEST:** Use a toilet paper roll to test for choking hazards. Manipulate any small parts to make sure they don't break off with pressure and watch our advocate demonstrate how to test for this hazard. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).



## Balloons

Balloons are the primary cause of suffocation deaths in toys, according to the CPSC. Children can accidentally inhale balloons while inflating them, swallow uninflated balloons while chewing on them, or ingest broken balloon pieces, all of which can lead to suffocation.

**ADVICE:** Regardless of whether a warning label is present on the packaging, uninflated balloons should be kept away from children under eight and broken pieces should be removed immediately.

## Loud Noises

That toy gun, action figure, or other noisy toy isn't just annoying. Our audio testing discovered two toys that likely violate standards set by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Haktoys' ATS Battery Operated Bump & Go Action 8" Police Car played sounds reaching 89 decibels, while the Kicko Toy Gun Blue Light-Up Noise Blaster reached over 87 decibels. If it's too loud, it can hurt a child's hearing. While you may not have the equipment to test for noise hazards in your home, there is a simpler solution: if it sounds too loud near your

head, it is probably too loud for your child's extra-sensitive, developing hearing.



**TEST:** Simulate how your child will play with the toy. If it sounds too loud, you can sometimes remove batteries to stop the noise, put tape over the speaker to muffle it, or reduce the volume. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).

## Toys Intended for Teens or Adults

Some products may be intended for teens or adults and were designed to meet different safety standards, meaning they can pose a serious safety or health risk when used by younger children.

### Fidget spinners & other focus devices

In 2017, we found excess lead levels in two fidget spinners, including the Fidget Wild Premium Spinner with 300 times the allowable level. Toys marketed to adults may not be held to the same safety standards as children's products, containing higher levels of lead or posing a choking hazard. And yet, many such products are marketed to children, including versions designed to look like Captain America's shield or a Transformer.

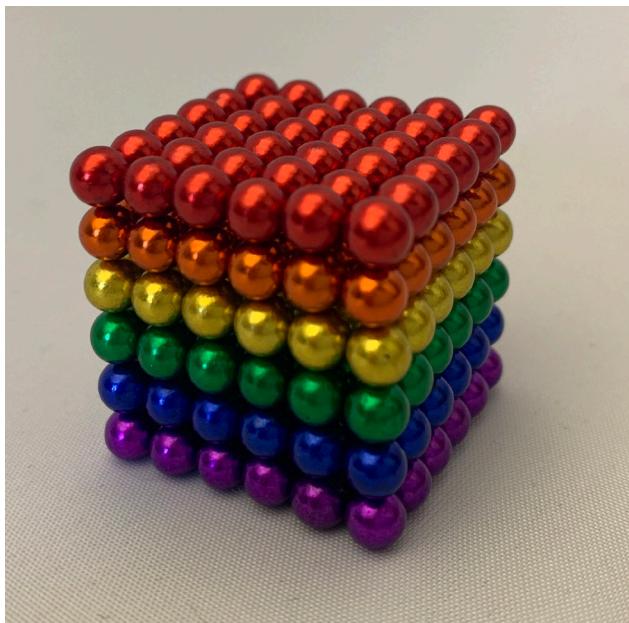


**ADVICE:** Avoid these "focus tools" for young children, as they could pose a safety hazard.

**POLICY ACTION:** The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission should apply the same safety standards to fidget spinners and other focus-toys, which can be directly or indirectly marketed to children.

## Strong magnets

Two doctors at Doernbecher Children's Hospital, Portland, Oregon, recently removed 54 small magnets from four children in just over a month. Small, powerful magnets used in various toys, including construction sets, educational tiles, and sculpture kits can cause serious harm and even death when swallowed. A ban on these powerful magnets was overturned in 2016.



**ADVICE:** Keep strong magnet toys like DigitDots out of reach of children or out of your home.

**POLICY ACTION:** The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission should propose a new safety standard for these small, powerful magnets.

# Hidden hazards

## Toxics

Parents and gift givers can't have a laboratory in their homes to test for toxic contaminants like lead, cadmium, and boron, and new investigations continuously reveal toys and products for sale with toxic contamination. While we've made significant progress, the constant proliferation of new toys on the market, including cheap knock-offs, means that you may not know for years that these toxins are hurting your child's health.

## Lead

Earlier this year, an investigation found a xylophone sold on Amazon contained almost four times the federal lead limit. Our past research found 300 times the allowable level of lead in fidget spinners. Children under six are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning, which can impair mental and physical development, especially since children may swallow chips of lead-based paint or ingest the toxin by sucking on a toy.



Courtesy of Wall Street Journal

**ADVICE:** Do not purchase toys made before 2008, which was the implementation year for the new standard for lead in toys. Be careful when purchasing imported or cheap toys, which are more likely to contain lead exceeding the legal limits. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).

## Boron

Our testing revealed levels of boron (an element in borax) exceeding European Union safety standards in four out of four slimes tested, including the DIY 3-Pack of Rainbow Cosmic Slime Shakers. This slime's mixing agent contained 75 times the EU standard and lacked clear warning labels not to ingest. Ingesting moderate to high doses of boron can cause nausea, vomiting, and other long-term damages.



**ADVICE:** Many alternative, homemade recipes are safe and fun for kids, allowing you to use natural, non toxic ingredients. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).

**POLICY ACTION:** The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission should set limits for safe levels of borax in toys and require clear warning labels that ingesting this toxin can cause a serious health risk.

## Cadmium

The Washington Attorney General found cadmium in children's jewelry above the legal limit of 40 ppm. This toxic metal is sometimes used as a substitute for precious metals in inexpensive jewelry, including dress-up jewelry marketed to young children. Cadmium consumed by children builds up and can lead to certain cancers, osteoporosis, and other health complications as adults.



**ADVICE:** If your child is under six, watch them carefully to confirm that they don't swallow a piece of jewelry, chew on the item, or put it in their mouths. Also, consider avoiding cheaper metallic jewelry that is imported. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).

**POLICY ACTION:** Companies and retailers should stop using manufacturers that may substitute in cheaper metals for gold jewelry. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and state Attorneys General should continue testing kid's jewelry for cadmium to identify more contaminated products.

## Cybersecurity Hazards

In the past, "smart toys" like the My Friend Cayla doll or the Furby Connect have recorded children's voices or kept histories of the data they entered. Smart toys that operate over non secure networks can collect and store this information, leaving it vulnerable to hackers.



**ADVICE:** Pay close attention to the privacy settings of toys, kid's tablets, and other interactive products; only use them over a secure network or completely offline; and be aware of the personal information you or your child enters. More info at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org).

**POLICY ACTION:** Continued enforcement of the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) will help ensure kids are protected from dangerous toys.

# Recalled Toys



Since last year's *Trouble in Toyland*, 12 more toys were recalled due to a number of threats, including choking hazards, burn risks, and more. These recalls covered over 600,000 units.

We were able to purchase two even older recalled toys on eBay. INNOCHEER's Kids Musical Instrument Set was recalled in October 2018 for violating the federal lead paint ban. VTech's Musical Elephant Shaker was recalled in January of 2018, but was still available for sale more than 18 months later.

In addition to finding recalled toys still for sale online, many products also remain in peoples' homes. A survey earlier this year by U.S. PIRG Education Fund found 1 in 10 surveyed childcare facilities still using recalled inclined sleepers, despite a heavily publicized recall. The same problem exists in the toy market, potentially to a greater extent, since many recalls receive less attention in the media regardless of their risk.



**ADVICE:** Before giving an old or pre-owned toy to a kid, confirm the product has not been recalled. Instructions at [consumertips.uspirg.org](http://consumertips.uspirg.org)

**POLICY CHANGE:** Our recall system should require companies to directly notify customers through retailer partnerships, engage in recall marketing campaigns equivalent to those that sold the product, and directly notify child care centers of recalled products potentially used in their facilities.